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ABSTRACT

As the large immigrant/refugee population in the United States ages, mainstream institutions, such as schools, workplaces, and social services, are increasingly challenged to meet the needs of elders. Certain themes and difficulties in acculturation emerge repeatedly, including financial insecurities, health issues, loneliness and isolation, stresses in the family and community in light of changing values, and barriers to accessing mainstream services and resources. All of these issues are somehow linked to language ability and language use, and very little is known about language use in immigrant and refugee households. A discussion of research needs in this area presents observations on the role of language and literacy in the adaptation of Hmong, Khmer, Chinese, and Latin elders in Philadelphia. It is argued that in order to meet the needs of uprooted elders, it is necessary to address the following questions: (1) What are the functions of language and literacy (both English and native language) in the lives of uprooted elders? (2) How do older refugees/immigrants solve problems requiring English language skills? and (3) What is the significance of language in the negotiation of new roles and relationships? It is also suggested that systematic qualitative research is the best way to examine these questions, and an appropriate theoretical framework is proposed. (Author/MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Language, Literacy and the Older Refugee in America: Research Agenda for the 90s.

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Language, Literacy and the Older Refugee in America: Research Agenda for the 90s

Gail Weinstein-Shr and Nora Lewis
November, 1989

As the large immigrant/refugee population in the U.S. begins to age, mainstream institutions are increasingly challenged to meet the needs of elders who trace their roots to other countries. Although the problems faced by older immigrants and refugees vary among cultural groups and individuals, there are themes and difficulties in adaptation that repeatedly surface, including financial insecurities, health issues, loneliness and isolation, stresses in the family and community in light of changing values, and barriers to accessing mainstream services and resources.

All of these difficulties are in some ways linked to the issue of language ability and language use. While current theory in TESOL holds that it is important to teach language of immediate relevance for use, in fact, very little is known about how language is used in immigrant/refugee households.

This paper presents preliminary observations on the role of language and literacy in the adaptation of Hmong, Khmer, Chinese and Latino elders in Philadelphia. We argue that in order to meet the needs of uprooted elders, it is necessary to know the answers to the following questions: 1) what are the functions and uses of language and literacy (in both English and the native language) in the lives of uprooted elders?; 2) how do older refugees/immigrants solve problems that require English language skills?; and 3) what is the significance of language in the negotation of new roles and relationships in the U.S.?

We also argue that systematic qualitative research is the best way to go about examining these questions and propose a theoretical framework appropriate for the inquiry.

Language, Literacy and the Older Refugee in America: Research Agenda for the 90s.

"I have ears but I am deaf! I have a tongue but I am mute!"

--- an elder Chinese refugee speaking of life in his English-speaking neighborhood

Introduction

Since the end of World War II, the United States has provided haven for about two million refugees who were involuntarily displaced from their homelands. In the last decade alone, some 800,000 Southeast Asians, 100,000 Soviet Jews, and 125,000 Cubans have been accepted for resettlement in this country (Office of Refugee Resettlement 1986). While these three groups represent the largest refugee populations, others have been admitted from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Poland, Rumania and elsewhere. In addition, over the last thirty years, over one million legal immigrants arrived voluntarily and began new lives in this country (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1980). It is not known how many undocumented or "illegal" refugees have also found their way within United States borders.

Inevitably, communities throughout the country are becoming increasingly culturally diverse. The impact has been felt in all institutions, including schools, workplaces and social service programs. Although involuntary displacement initially selects against older refugees, the proportion of older people is

shifting as the refugee population ages in America. Mainstream institutions will be increasingly challenged to meet the needs of a culturally diverse older population as the number of elders who trace their roots to other countries continues to grow.

Some of the problems faced by refugee and immigrant elderly in the United States are similar to difficulties experienced by all older Amerians, but many of the difficulties are peculiar to their special position of growing old in a foreign culture. While certain problems are specific to particular cultural groups or to individuals within each group, there are general themes and difficulties in adaptation that surface repeatedly. Those that have been documented include financial insecurities, health issues, struggles with daily living, loneliness and isolation, intergenerational tensions, stresses in the family and community in light of changing values, and barriers to use of mainstream services and resources (Refugee Policy Group 1988).

Many uprooted elders report that their difficulties in adapting to life in the United States are critically linked to their own lack of English language skills (Hayes 1984, Reder 1982, 1985, Dowing and Dwyer 1981, Downing and Olney 1982). Those who work with refugees and immigrants are also aware that language is a major factor in access to community resources, and negotiation of relationships both within and outside of the family.

Because of the federal priority of reducing dependence on welfare, the majority of existing English language programs are

geared toward employable youth. Elders may not have access at all, or they quickly become frustrated when they participate in classes that are paced for younger learners. These frustrations are exacerbated for those elders lacking in formal educational background and native language literacy skills, who are not accustomed to learning in formal classroom settings (Weinstein 1985). To make matters worse, there are obstacles even for those few agencies that are interested in providing language programs for elders. While current theory in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) holds that it is important to teach language of immediate relevance for use, in fact, very little is known about what kinds of language skills are really needed by elders, or how language is used in immigrant/refugee households.

We have found at Project LEIF[1], for example, that while languages materials for refugee adults often stress "survival" skills, such as reading mail or filling out forms, younger family members often perform this task in immigrant/refugee households. When asked why they want to study English, elders often report that they want to help their adult children to succeed, or to communicate with their grandchildren. One Hmong woman expressed

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[1] Learning English through Intergenerational Friendship is a model program developed at Temple University Institute on Aging's Center for Intergenerational Learning. Through Project LEIF, over 300 college-age volunteers have been trained to tutor English as a Second Language (ESL) to elder refugees and immigrants at four community centers throughout the city. These include a Cambodian Buddhist temple, a Chinese community center, a Latino Senior Center, and a multicultural neighborhood center. For more information on Project LEIF, see Weinstein-Shr 1989.

her sorrow that her grandchildren knew nothing of Laos. With the growing language gap, she is certain that she will never be able to tell the youngest children what their homeland was like in language that they will understand.

This paper reviews some of the special problems facing uprooted elders as they adjust to life in the United States. Issues involved in assessing language needs in particular are outlined in light of current language teaching theory. Third, drawing on the authors' experiences working in Philadelphia's refugee and immigrant homes over the last three years, some preliminary observations are made about the role of language in the lives of Limited English-Proficient elders. Finally, it is suggested that more systematic qualitative research is in order, and a theoretical framework for such inquiry is proposed.

Uprooted Elders: Meeting Basic Needs

One set of issues addressed in the literature on older immigrants and refugees concerns their ability to meet basic needs. Uprooted elders are in "quadruple jeopardy" -- they are, for the most part, poor, minority, old and non-English speaking (Lum 1983). There is increasing documentation of the obstacles that uprooted elders face in coping with problems of daily living. Financial problems, lack of adequate housing, poor health, lack of access to transportation and residence in high crime neighborhoods are among the difficulties that pose challenges for elders (Gozdziak 1988). In a national study to assess

service needs of Latino elderly, Lacayo (1980) found that respondents spoke Spanish 75-93% of the time, and that lack of English proficiency interfered with problem-solving in almost all areas of the elders' lives. A study of Asian-Americans indicates that while these groups are seen as people who "take care of their own," in fact, those studied were in need of extensive social services (Lum 1983).

Ironically, even when social services are available, the very problems needing to be addressed may keep uprooted elders from gaining access to resources. Lack of information is the first obvious obstacle. Limited English Proficient elders are also stymied by inability to use public transportation systems and by fear of venturing out among strangers whose language they do not understand (especially in poor neighborhoods, where fear of crime is often well-founded). Even when services are physically accessible, uprooted elders are often unable to tap these resources because of cultural and linguistic barriers between themselves and the people or agencies that provide services to the elderly (Krupp and Ramshala 1985).

Changing roles, changing relationships

A second set of issues facing uprooted elders that is coming to light is the inevitable shift in roles and statuses as families adapt to life in a new setting. For many cultures, the family rather than the individual is the basic unit of society. In many Asian cultures, "filial piety" is characteristic of

family relationships. Children are indebted to their parents for the sacrifices made in their upbringing and for the gift of life itself. Children are obliged to support their parents, for "parent should suffer neither want nor sorrow" (Hayes 1984). The family has been very important in certain Latino groups as well, where the elderly are traditionally central to decision-making and are treated with great respect (Maldonado 1979).

This position of respect and authority becomes problematic in the United States, where, because of their inability to speak English, the elderly are no longer in a privileged position for problem-solving. For uprooted elders, the resettlement process has created a major gap between roles that are available to them and those to which they are accustomed. They can no longer provide land and other inheritances for their children, nor do they have knowledge needed to advise their families regarding many important decisions (Cox and Gelfand 1985). Erosion of traditional roles has been documented among both Asian and Latino groups as contributions and assistance that elders can offer the family diminish (Kalish and Yuen 1971, and Fujii 1976 on Asians, Maldonado 1979, Solis 1975 and Valle and Mendoza 1978 on Latinos). As this "role emptying" takes place, the elderly are put in an unfavorable exchange position, having little to offer family and community (Gozdziak 1988).

One consequence of shifting roles is the rise of tensions within refugee and immigrant families (Weinstein-Shr and Henkin, forthcoming). As young people learn English and new American

ways, elders begin to rely on them for major decisions and problem-solving (Hayes 1984). Children or even grandchildren are often placed in the position of acting as translators for welfare and other agencies, reversing traditional dependency roles. One Cambodian parent in Philadelphia complained that he was forced to rely on his son to translate documents from school and thus did not know for six months that his son had been expelled! It has been shown that the more rapidly children acculturate, the more likely it is that family conflict will occur (Alley 1980). In a study analyzing generational differences, Bengston and Kuypers (1979) found older members interested in maintaining already-established relationships while the young focused on developing close relationships with peers. Under these conditions, value conflicts frequently arise as elders cling to their traditional customs while younger family members abandon them.

It is evident from the research cited above, that language use is central, whether implicitly or explicitly, to problems faced by elders in meeting basic needs and in negotiating new roles and relationships in their new lives.

Refugee resettlement and second language teaching

Language education has taken quantum leaps over the last decade. Methods and materials in teaching English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL) began to shift from a structural or grammatical organization to more communicative orientations. The new focus was no longer on "what students know about the

language but what they can do with it" (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:7). This era has seen a rise in popularity of both notional/functional frameworks, which organize language teaching around "functions" a learner needs to express (such as asking questions, expressing emotions/attitudes, indicating time, orientation, etc.), and topical frameworks, which divide language into subject areas such as family, home, money, transportation, etc.

At the same time, adult learning theory emphasized the importance of experience-centered learning growing from the needs and goals of the adult learner (Knowles 1973). Northrup (1977), in the Texas Adult Performance Level Study, attempted to operationalize these notions of Adult Education by identifying 65 competencies "necessary for an adult to perform successfully in today's society." Hence the beginning of competency-based education in adult learning theory.

The shift towards competency-based education

These parallel trends in adult education and in ESL made for a natural partnership. As early as 1980, several ESL writers were struggling with the language of competency-based education and its fit in the TESL mission. Berg and Galley Schwartz (1980) argue, in The CB Reader that, if Competency-Based Education is defined as "an educational process leading to demonstrated mastery of basic and life skills necessary for the individual to function in society" then indeed, that is what language teachers

had been doing all along. ESL professionals aim to provide students with coping skills, or

> a bringing together of the language (structurally speaking) and the culture inherent in the language in a way that is consistent with the adult learner's needs and a representation of the real language used in his/her real world. p.70

By 1983, the way had been paved for a more formal marriage of the two concepts. Competency-Based Education/English as a Second Language (henceforth CBE/ESL) was conceived as a framework for curricula to teach toward "task oriented goals written in terms of behavioral objectives which include language behavior" (CAL 1983:9). It is no coincidence that in 1983-84, the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded the MELT project (Mainstream English Language Training Project) to develop "Student Performance Levels", a competency-based curriculum guide, and a competency-based ESL test (Adkins 1985).

In this way, the federal government sought to support language teaching in which the explicit goal was self-sufficiency, and in which teachers could be held accountable for specific learning outcomes (Nathan and Lindley 1980).

Finding "Real Reality"

The problems of bringing "real language" into the classroom has been an issue since communicative language teaching became popular (Taylor 1982). Auerbach and Burgess (1985) provide some disturbing and poignant examples to illustrate that the picture

painted in "survival" language texts may be far removed from the reality of the America that refugees inhabit. For example, a dialog is highlighted from a unit on health:

A. Hello. This is Doctor Green's office.

B. This is Mary Thomas. I'm calling about my daughter. She has a fever and a rash.

A. When can you bring her in?

B. Right away.

A. All right. We'll see you in a few minutes.

(reprinted in Auerbach and Burgess 1985).

As Auerbach and Burgess point out, not only is it unlikely that a doctor's office would ever respond like this, it is also unlikely that a refugee would ever see the inside of a private doctor's office at all. Clinics with long waits are certainly closer to the norm.

In a very poignant example, Auerbach and Burgess contrast a language unit on housing with an article about "real reality" from the Boston Globe:

A. The kitchen has a new sink and stove... The bedroom has a beautiful river view.

B. Yes it does. How many closets are there?

A. Three closets and a linen closet. The bathroom is very modern.

B. Does it have a shower and a bathtub?

A. Yes, it does.

B. I like it. I'll take it.

(cited in Auerbach and Burgess 1985)

> "We buy the diapers, the Huggies", Le Suong was saying. "In the cold, they are good to stuff in the cracks by the window". "But it's not the cold that is the biggest problem,", Nguyen Van Sau said. "It is getting somebody to come when things get broke, when the ceiling cracks, or when people get scared of a fire like there was at number 4. We call, 10, 15 times and nobody comes. All I want them to [do is] clean and make the rats go so children will not be near them," he said. "I tell them once about a rat and the man, he say to eat it" Sing Ha, 9, said. "He laugh and say we eat dogs so we can eat rats too."
>
> (Barnicle, 1984 quoted in Auerbach and Burgess 1985).

If the intent, as the Center for Applied Linguistics (1983:7) suggests, is to have "adults begin by learning for and from the situations in which they find themselves", it is crucial for teachers and program planners to know something about the reality of the situation in which their students do indeed find themselves. Learning about the reality of elders' lives can occur through observation, as well as by listening to the elders themselves.

One problem for educators and policy-makers is to know what students bring to their "survival" in this new setting. Weinstein (1985) dutifully taught a class of older Hmong women to read supermarket labels, only to discover that the women bought their meat wholesale from a butcher and grew their own vegetables. After having them practice filling out forms, observations in family settings made it clear that the older children who had a facility with literacy did the family form-filling.

Through work with elders in Philadelphia's Cambodian, Chinese and Latino communities over the last several years, the

authors have had an opportunity to make some preliminary observations about the situations in which elders find themselves, as well as the needs they express in wanting to learn English. One pattern that emerges is that our concept of classic "survival English" is only one aspect of what motivates elders to enter our ESL program. Requests for help with English for traditional "survival" functions have included specific problems running the gamut from talking to the doctor to making change to using public transportation. While these requests do surface from time to time, "survival language" needs have not been voiced as often as we had expected. Project LEIF tutors have reported that many Latino elders, some of whom have lived in the U.S. for more than twenty years, have all their "survival" needs met within the Spanish-speaking community, with little or no need to speak English in order to buy food, visit the clinic, or participate in senior center activities. Rather, the most frequent request elders make of teachers/tutors is for language teaching that will help them establish, strengthen, or maintain social relations with children, grandchildren and English-speaking neighbors.

Assessment of need requires knowing not only the realities of the host environment, but also knowing what problem-solving strategies students already have. Older students are not individuals in a vacuum - they are members of networks, with ways of getting things done (cf Weinstein-Shr, forthcoming). With more information on what problems really need to be solved, and what resources are already available, it can become possible to

teach language that matters.

Assessing language needs: A theoretical framework

In order to design programs and policies that facilitate the adaptation of uprooted elders to life in the United States, it is necessary to find the answers to the following questions:

> What are the functions and uses of language and literacy (both native and English) in the lives of uprooted elders?
>
> How do uprooted elders solve problems (or fail to solve problems) that require English language skills?
>
> What is the significance of language in the negotiation of new roles and relationships when adapting to a new setting? (i.e. how has authority/power shifted in the family? what is the role of language in intergenerational relationships?)

In the past twenty years, researchers studying the patterning of language use and language functions in various communities have developed a framework for examining the interaction of language with social organization. The development of the concept of the "ethnography of speaking" (Hymes 1964, 1974) and work done in the area of domains of language use in bi- or multilingual communities (see Blom and Gumperz 1966, Fishman 1971) contribute most directly to this framework.

The ethnography of speaking

The "ethnography of speaking" as developed by Hymes involves study of the social contexts and functions of communication in a community in conjunction with the linguistic means used to serve

them (1974: 5). The starting point for this study is the community or social group itself and analysis of "speech situations," "speech events," and "speech acts" within the community (Hymes 1974).

Data are gathered through detailed observation and recording in a variety of situations involving language use (spoken and/or written) among individuals in the community and analyzed along the following dimensions. The "speech situation" is analogous to Gumperz' and Fishman's "social situation" and designates "activities carried on by particular constellations of personnel, gathered in particular settings during a particular span of time" (Blom and Gumperz 1972: 423). A speech situation is a bounded activity describable in terms of both verbal and nonverbal events. Research has emphasized the importance of both role relationships among the participants and locale or physical environment in analyzing the relationship of speech situation to language choice (Blom and Gumperz 1972 [1966], Gumperz 1964, Fishman 1971).

At the next level of specificity, a "speech event" is an activity that is directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech (Hymes 1974: 52). Examples of speech events might include a conversation, an argument, a marriage ceremony, a religious initiation rite, a speech or lecture, etc. A speech event is made up of one or more "speech acts", or verbal exchanges that carry certain intentions on the part of the speaker and result in observable effects on the listener.

Because the use of language is interdependent with social roles and social structure, the study of functions and uses of language provides a key to the organization of other processes in the community. Studies of literacy practices (Heath 1983) and the organization of talk (Michaels 1981, Phillips 1983) have been used to understand the processes by which children who differ from their teachers in ways of using language fail in school. The collection of "speech events" and "literacy events" has provided a means to create taxonomies that elucidate patterns of use for individuals and for communities.

Mapping language use

The idea of behavioral domains associated with language choice, first used by Schmidt-Rohr (1963) and further developed by Fishman (1965, 1971), relates patterns of language use among individuals to clusters of values within a society. The language use of individuals in specific areas or "domains" such as education, home and family, work and religion are examined in detail through ethnographic and sociological survey and interview methods, and the collective data summed so that general patterns for the larger society can be abstracted. Ethnographic studies of communication have been undertaken to examine processes of language stability or change (e.g., Gal 1979, Fishman 1971) and the relationship of speech situations to language choice (Blom and Gumperz 1972, Gumperz 1964, Fishman 1971). In many communities where more than one language is used,

research on switching between different varieties of language ("codes") in conversations between bilingual individuals has provided further information about the uses and functions of different languages in a community (Ervin-Tripp 1964, Gumperz 1964, 1972).

It is clear that language use has important implications for social relationships - both as a reflection of those relationships and as a factor that affects them. Weinstein-Shr (forthcoming) found that language use reflected social patterns in Philadelphia's Hmong community, and she also found that coming to a literate environment, for Hmong refugees, had a profound impact on who turned to whom for help. Specifically, she found that the ways in which literacy was used characterized two different sub-communities with different means of adapting to American life, and that while problem-solving once occured primarily between kin in clan groups, the need to solve bureaucratic and other literacy-related problems has forced some newcomers to rely on literacy "specialists" who may not be available within their own clans.

For elders, the ways in which language is used both reflects their position and their preferences, while also constraining their choices as new relationships are negotiated. Many of the Puerto Rican elders who enroll in Project LEIF, for example, have continued speaking Spanish as they identify with island life and with Puerto Rican neighbors. When asked why they would want to participate in a language tutoring program, they report that as

English becomes the language of their families, grandchildren grow up monolingual speakers of English; bilingual children tend to use English more and more with their own children and have little time to translate for their Spanish-speaking parents. As a result, elders who were once the active heads of their households complain about feeling like "outsiders" in their own children's homes. These elders feel they need to learn English in order to stay connected to their families and not be left on the sidelines of family activities and decisions.

Examples of role changes and conflicts created by language use have also become evident at the Cambodian Buddhist temple in Philadelphia. Here, young monks who learned English in school must often translate for older monks, including the head monk, who have learned little of the language. Elders (who are considered to be teachers within the Buddhist hierarchy) report their discomfort as they must rely on the younger monks, who find it equally awkward to show respect and deference to their superiors while managing the majority of interactions with the English-speaking interlocutors in the host setting. Neither party wants to be seen as unable to fulfill their role, nor do they want to act in ways consistent with the status of the other. As a result, the head monks display an ambivalent attitude to learning English: while anxious to study in order to be able to interact with the larger English-speaking society without the help of intermediaries, these elders also resist being put in the inappropriate role of student. In these

examples drawn from the Hmong, Puerto Ricans and Cambodian communities, language is both an agent of change and a lens through which to look at changes in the social order.

While studies of language have been used to look at social process, this framework has never been used to look specifically at the issues facing uprooted elders. With language and language use so central to the experience of uprooted elders, the "ethnography of speaking" and "domains of language use" provide a logical framework for examining that experience and for gaining insights into the process of adaptation and change. These are discussed below.

Ethnographic Approaches to Inquiry

The selection of strategies, methods of data collection and analysis must be determined by the research problem of examining interaction processes. How do elders and their family members use language? What are the consequences for the quality of their lives? Without understanding the perspectives of the people studied, not only are researchers at a disadvantage in getting the answers, they may be unable to ask the questions in a meaningful way.

For example, Weinstein-Shr (1986) found that when she asked Hmong refugees in an early questionnaire "Who do you depend on for help?", the question evoked little response. After intensive work with one family, it became clear that the people to whom they were closest shared in the buying of pigs to cook for ritual

occasions. The question "who do you share pigs with" was more useful in eliciting information about helping relationships, and was used successfully in subsequent interviews with other families.

An ethnographic perspective is one in which description takes into account the perspectives of members of a social group (emic) as well as the perspectives of the scientist (etic). The contrast between etic and emic frameworks in language use is illustrated by a curriculum commissioned by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (Mainstream English Language Training 1985). Linguists were hired to create an exhaustive checklist of "language competencies" needed by adults to "function adequately" in America. From writing checks to reading labels on medicine bottles, the curriculum seemed fool-proof, leaving few competencies uncovered. It is clear, however, that this is only the first step. In the Latino neighborhood where LEIF is set up, for example, elders shop in grocery stores where everything is labeled in Spanish. They do not put their money in the bank for fear of having it taken by "welfare". One LEIF participant bitterly complains that when he is on "the island" (Puerto Rico), he cannot understand his grandchildren's letters, which they write to him in English. For him, to "function adequately" is to know that he can stay connected to his family through communication across distances. The "scientific" (etic) checklist could not get at those competencies that had (emic) meaning to him.

Within an ethnographic approach to inquiry there are a number of methods a researcher interested in language use can employ to discover emic meanings. One challenge posed by these methods is that the researcher must first establish a consistent role in the community under study, so as to gain access to elders and earn their trust. For us, provision of English language tutoring has provided a natural way to ask elders about their lives, and to observe up close as elders bring us their language-related concerns.

Participant-observation of elders in their home environment, both during and outside of "language learning activities," is one of the primary and most useful ethnographic techniques available. Such observation focuses on uses of language and literacy for elders, as well as elders' strategies (or lack of strategies) for solving language and literacy-related problems. Specifically, the researcher maps language domains, noting "who speaks which language to whom and under what conditions" (Fishman 1971), and documents speech events in which English is an integral part of the interaction. Of particular interest also are what Heath terms "literacy events" in which written text in the native language or English are key to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes (1982). Once a relationship of trust is established, other techniques which require more active solicitation of data can also used, such as mapping elders' social networks to document resources available to them for solving language and literacy related problems; or

collecting life histories to help provide insights into elders' perceptions of their own roles within their families and the ways in which those roles have changed.

Once collected, the information from these activities, in the form of field notes, can be analyzed and coded for recurring themes. For example, one theme that appears often in notes from conversations with elders in LEIF is concern about how language is affecting intergenerational relationships. Further fieldwork data will allow us to discover other areas where language use has an important impact on elders. A second process of data analysis will lead to the creation of categories or typologies of language use. It is important to examine carefully the content of language and literacy events in order to gain insight into which kinds of events are problematic for elders and which ones do not require attention or intervention. For example, "survival skills" for getting around the neighborhood may be one type of language use, while "relating to members in the family" may be another. The creation of these typologies will arise from specific cases and can then be checked across cultural groups to broaden the utility of the category discovered for language planners and practitioners.

If language planners and practitioners are to meet the needs of particular groups, it will be important to investigate systematically the answers to the questions posed earlier regarding 1) the functions and uses of language and literacy; 2) how older refugees/immigrants solve problems that require English language skills; and 3) the significance of language in the

negotiation of new roles and relationships in the United States. While it is clear that these questions are essential, the way to find the answers for a particular group or community cannot be determined at the outset. Rather, in order to learn how to ask, it will be necessary to go in, listen, watch and learn. The first requirement is to create a role in the community in which trust can be established. Then, methods associated with the ethnography of speaking and the mapping of domains of language use provide a way to begin to pursue these questions.

Summary and conclusions: A call for research

In the pages above, we have provided evidence that uprooted elders are faced with difficulties in coping with daily living, with gaining access to existing services or resources, and in negotiating new roles within their families and their communities. While it is clear that language use is central to all of these issues, no research to date has investigated the role that language plays in the lives of uprooted elders. While the idea behind competency-based approaches to language teaching is theoretically sound, the content of materials designed to date continues to miss the mark. It is only by systematic examination of language and language use that we can gain insight into the processes by which uprooted elders cope or fail to cope with their new lives and changing relationships in their new setting. If we are to meet the needs of uprooted elders (or of any other group) we have to listen to their voices.

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